

EASTER IN POLAND.

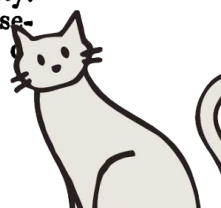
Picture to yourself, my dear M——, a vast and elegant Château, of no particular style of architecture, but resembling the modern ornamental form of building now in use in England; situated on a gently rising ground, in the midst of the most charming scenery, and you will have before you Vasilowka, the residence of our esteemed friend, the Count R——, a wealthy proprietor in the Great Duchy of Posen. Here we are installed for a few days, previous to our projected journey in Hungary; and as we know you to be somewhat curious as to the habits and manner of living of the Poles in their own country, we will endeavour to enlighten you, by a slight description of Vasilowka and its inhabitants. First, then, let your eyes follow ours, as we gaze from the windows of our room on the rich and varied prospect that spreads before us. Surrounding the house is a large garden, thickly planted with trees and shrubs, which present at this season of the year all those tender shades of green and yellow which are only to be seen in spring; intermixed here and there with the dark fir-tree, and the white-blossomed cassia. To the right, the grass-plots and gravel-walk are bordered by a row of tall poplars; behind which is a plantation of lesser trees, at whose feet blossom thousands and thousands of violets, loading the morning air with their sweet perfume. Beautiful blue violets! ye are the same wherever we meet with you; in the hedge-rows and lanes of our own dear country, or here in a foreign land, always lovely and fragrant, the type of those good and modest beings, who suffer not their works to be known of men, leaving them to be discovered only by the perfume they shed around. Straight before us, the horizon is bounded by the rich, dark green of a pine-wood, which commences at the termination of the garden, and forms the favourite retreat of the inhabitants of Vasilowka during the summer heats, which in this country are very considerable. Farther on towards the left, the view stretches away for miles and miles over corn-fields and meadows, here and there dotted with the red roofs and white walls of some village homes, and charmingly diversified by three lakes, which lie at a short distance from each other, and shine like silver in the bright rays of the sun.

It is noon: there has been a slight fall of rain, and the light drops still glitter on the grass, which, after its refreshing bath, looks as verdant and as velvety as our own far-famed English plots. The birds are twittering amongst the branches, and the bright sunshine and the soft air, laden with fragrance from myriads of modest spring flowers, shed their sweet influence upon us, lifting up our hearts in veritable thanksgiving to the bountiful Creator of so much loveliness. The winters in this country are extremely severe, but the transition to spring is very sudden; and you would be sur-

prised to see what an immense change is produced in everything in the course of a few days.

The farm buildings and stables here lie at some distance from the house, which you reach by a carriage-drive round a large piece of grass, bordered with thick shrubs and trees, on which struts, in all the majesty of his beauty, the proud and haughty peacock. Mounting a flight of stone steps, you enter a lofty hall, appropriately ornamented by heads and antlers of deer. The large windows on each side the entrance-door are filled with stained glass, through which the sun's rays fall in every variety of colour on the floor. To the right, a door leads to the apartments of the master of the house; on the left, another gives admission to the large dining-hall; and in the centre lies a suite of drawing-rooms, leading at one end to the library and green-house, and on the other to the sleeping and dressing-rooms of the ladies of the house. These communicate by a back staircase with the rooms above, and the underground story, which contains the kitchens, the servants' rooms, the bakehouse, the brewhouse, the laundry, and the cellars—all admirably arranged. There is no carpet to be seen in any part of the mansion; but the floors are all waxed and polished, and in the drawing and dining-rooms are beautifully inlaid with different coloured woods in stars and squares. The windows are all double for the winter, though they are taken out at this period of the year; and every apartment is heated by a large porcelain stove, about four or five yards high, which gives a delightful temperature to the rooms, but wants the cheerfulness and apparent comfort of our large open grates, with their bright coal fires. There is a large billiard-room on the first floor, and all the rest of the rooms there are devoted to the accommodation of guests, who in this most hospitable country are very numerous in almost all the houses. There is yet another floor, containing some good rooms, and a lofty turret, in which is an immense clock, and from whence there is a splendid view of the surrounding country. From here we can plainly see our brother-in-law's pretty house and farm, with its fields and meadows, its little lake, and its thick wood; and beyond this, the old church and convent of L——. It was built in the eleventh century, and was a convent of Benedictine monks till within the last fifteen or twenty years, when the late King of Prussia abolished all the religious houses in his kingdom, leaving only the Sisters of Charity.

The family of the Count R—— is numerous, consisting of his wife and six children. He himself is a man of some fifty years, of a noble and upright character; a true patriot, and a clever and most agreeable companion in society. His estates are very extensive, comprising several villages, and a superb forest, the sale of



whose wood alone brings in a handsome revenue, as here it is an article of great consumption, coals not being used to heat the stoves. The number of his farm-tenants, with their families, exclusive of those who live in the villages, amount to a thousand persons, for the welfare and well-being of whom he considers himself responsible in the sight of God. His wife, the amiable mistress of the mansion, is the pattern of every virtue that can adorn a woman; considerably younger than her husband, to whom she was united at the early age of sixteen, when in the full bloom of her beauty; she is as remarkable for her piety, and untiring devotion to all around her, as for the grace with which she performs the honours of the house to the numerous guests who partake of her husband's hospitality. She overlooks all the domestic arrangements of the château; she aids in the instruction of her children; she daily visits the poor and suffering in the neighbourhood, administering medicines with her own hands to those who are sick, and pouring tender words of consolation and religion into the ears of the dying. In these pious errands she is mostly accompanied by one or other of her daughters, who are thus early made acquainted with the sufferings of the poor, and taught the way to aid them. The Countess R— has established a school in the village of Vasilowka, where ninety poor children receive instruction, fitting them for becoming useful and respectable members of society. In the neighbouring small town of K—, she has also instituted an asylum for the reception of very young children, whose parents are unable to take charge of them during the day. The activity of her benevolence is surprising. How she can ever find time for all the good she does is a mystery to us, seeing her, as we do, constantly in the midst of a society of which she is the principal ornament. This week, however, must have taxed her powers to the utmost, for there are immense preparations going on for the Easter feast, which they keep up in this country with most of the old forms and ceremonies. To-day is the last day of Lent, and as fasting has been rigorously observed at Vasilowka during the whole of its continuance, you may imagine with what pleasure and impatience nearly everybody looks forward to to-morrow, more especially the children, and the poorer class of people. Everybody on the estate receives a certain quantity of provisions, and there is not a single cabin, however humble may be its inhabitants, that will not have its little feast on Easter Sunday.

The house is full of visitors, old and young, and all sorts of plans are being formed for the thorough enjoyment of the ensuing week; but hark! there is the first dinner-bell ringing, and our toilet has yet to be performed, so adieu for the present.

EASTER EVE.

On descending to the dining-hall, we found the company already assembled. Seated in the

place of honour, on the right hand of our hostess, we had ample opportunity for observing the different persons present. The ladies were all together at one end of the table, and the gentlemen at the other; the mistress of the house being seated in the centre, and her husband opposite her. The first person that attracted our attention was the parish priest, who dines every day at the Château; a rosy-faced, portly man, in a long black gown, with his thick grey hair cut close to his head, and a most good-humoured expression on his rather homely features, which instantly wins its way to the hearts of all the children, and has perhaps the same effect on grown people, for he is universally beloved. He is most conscientious in the discharge of all his spiritual duties, and untiring in his benevolence and charity; a true village pastor—the sympathising friend and adviser of even the very meanest of his flock. By his side was a young German artist from Munich, who has been living here during some months; the Count R—, who is a great admirer of the fine arts, having fitted up a studio for him, and engaged him to give lessons in painting to his daughters. Except when he is occupied with his pupils, he is always either at work in his studio, or out of doors sketching the neighbouring country; he has a view of Vasilowka from every possible point—it seems to be a favourite subject with him, and indeed it well deserves to be, for it is most picturesque. There is another German in the family, who is tutor to the younger sons of Count R—; his eldest, a fine boy of fourteen, being educated at college; though he has come home for the Easter holidays, and is seated amongst a group of cousins and schoolfellows about his own age, with whom he laughs and talks with all the happy freedom natural to home at holiday time. There are two or three of the cousins, though, who already look upon themselves as men, and keep apart from this youthful and noisy set, their ages being somewhere between fifteen and twenty. They vie with each other in their attentions to the fairer portions of the community, and try to talk off-hand, and look important, affecting a depth of knowledge on all subjects, which is really quite surprising for their years. By the side of these are two refugees, who at the time of the French Revolution left lucrative employments, which their industry and perseverance had gained for them in France, and fired with the vain hope of better times having arrived for their country, returned there only to find disappointment and distress. In most of the houses in the country there are one or two of these unfortunate men to be met with, they being hospitably received by their countrymen, and undertaking an almost nominal employment in the establishment, or on the estate, or in the education of the children, to have the permission from the government to remain, which otherwise would not be allowed; and even as it is, they are often persecuted and threatened by the authorities.

Vanda, the eldest daughter of the Count and Countess R—, is a tall and elegant girl of

Easter in Poland.

sixteen, with a quiet, dreamy expression in her soft blue eyes, which gives a peculiar charm to a face, not regularly handsome, but very attractive in its youth and freshness. Sure are we, the young painter, who glances timidly at her, when he thinks himself unobserved, deems her one of nature's fairest flowers, and who knows if he has not already got her pictured semblance, hidden somewhere amongst all the heap of landscapes and portraits with which his studio is filled? But oh! let not your heart mislead you, young man: she whom you gaze upon is the destined bride of some noble of her own country and religion; and you are a poor artist, a Protestant, and a German.

The second girl, Bronislas, a year younger than her sister, is very lovely, possessing that perfection of feature and purity of tint, which are rarely met with but in pictures. And they talk of her entering a convent—she, so full of life and animation, clever beyond her years, already an accomplished artist, and a promising musician; just the sort of person I should think fitted to shine in society. And this bright butterfly they would shut up within the walls of a convent; they would tear her for ever from the loving embraces of her family and friends, and place an immovable barrier between her and the world; that world, which is as yet but a pathway of flowers to her, and which, full as it is of deceptions, false hopes, and disappointed desires, still possesses many a charm for those who will cheerfully look for the good in everything, and bear in patience and uncomplainingly the trials that God sends. But it is not yet decided, and will not, I believe, take place, unless Bronislas herself feels a vocation for it; though as she is of a sensitive and ardent disposition, and has the example of several of her relations and friends who have become nuns, I doubt not such will ultimately be her lot.

Then there is the little Helena, a charming little bird, singing all day long, and never able to keep quiet for two minutes together. By her side is her governess, a young French lady, who vainly endeavours to restrain her exuberant gaiety, and teach the little puss decorum at the dinner-table. Mdlle. Lorene, like all the governesses in this country, is treated in every respect like one of the family. There is far more consideration shown to those who undertake the education of the young here, than, with a few exceptions, we have met with in England. And assuredly this is as it ought to be; for to whom do we owe more, than to the intelligent and patient instructress of our children?

The conversation here is mostly carried on in French. This custom used formerly to obtain to such an extent, that ladies at last generally knew that language better than their own; but latterly this has given place to the more sensible fashion of using their native tongue, except when foreigners are present; though in Warsaw at the present moment French is still the language of the drawing-room. English is being now very generally learnt, and we have met with many persons who can speak it very well indeed.

Many of our best authors, ancient and modern, have been translated into Polish. We have seen some of the plays of Shakspeare, the poetry of Milton, Wordsworth, and Byron; the novels of Scott, of Bulwer, Captain Marryatt, and Charles Dickens.

At dinner, every dish is carried round by the footman, and each guest helps himself, the various meats being already previously carved. They have no large joints, like we have in England; and the vegetables are given separate from the meat—though this is a French fashion rather than a Polish one. The ladies, old and young, married and single, with very few exceptions, touch nothing stronger than water in the way of beverage; and they look with much astonishment upon Englishwomen, who often take both beer and wine at dinner. On rising from table, all the company bow to each other; and most of the gentlemen, and all the young people, kiss the hand of the mistress of the house, and thank her for her society.

A fresh arrival has just taken place, which has given great pleasure to everybody, the more so as it was unlooked for. It is L—, one of the most celebrated amongst those musicians who claim Poland as their birthplace. He is an accomplished violoncellist, and has just returned from a tour in Russia, where he has been reaping golden harvests. He is of middle height, of a fair complexion, with an unmistakeably Polish face. He is the only scion of a noble family, his parents being long since dead. Forced by political circumstances to quit his native land, he became at a very early age an exile and a wanderer; endowed, however, by nature with a remarkable genius for music, he perfected his glorious talent in a foreign land, and has since gained great and deserved renown. To-morrow we are to hear his divine strains. Now, farewell! it is ten o'clock, and as a cannon is to be fired off at midnight, and at every succeeding hour, in honour of Easter, it is time we should think of taking a little quiet repose.

Oh! what a week of feasting and excitement this Easter week has been! but we must begin from the beginning, and give you as interesting an account of it as we can. Midnight before Easter Sunday was signalled by a merry peal of bells, and the cannon was fired off at different intervals, under the active and delighted generalship of Boleslas, our host's eldest son. At five o'clock there was a service at the church, and a procession, in honour of the Resurrection of our Lord. At eleven high mass was performed, at which all the family and guests assisted. The church, which is very old, being built partly in the eleventh century and partly in the fifteenth, was crowded by peasants, who were all dressed in their prettiest costumes. The many-coloured petticoats, the gay ribands floating in the breeze, and the various and picturesque head-dresses of the women, together with the long, full-skirted coats of the men, mostly of a dark-blue, and the streamers and bunches of flowers

Easter in Poland.

stuck in their hats and caps, formed such a striking and novel scene as we shall not soon forget. The sun shone so brightly, the birds sang so merrily, and on every face there was such an expression of pleasure, that it did the heart good to behold. On returning from Mass, all the company entered the great dining-hall, where a tempting sight presented itself. An immense table, spread from top to bottom of the apartment, covered with a large linen cloth, generally preserved as an heir-loom in the family. In the centre was a lofty tower of pastry, on the top of which was a roasted lamb—still, however, clothed in its primitive white vestment, to mimic life—holding a red and white banner, on which was the joyful motto, “Alleluja.” This was surmounted by a silver eagle, the emblem of Poland. At a little distance were heaps of sweetmeats, fruits, and preserves; then came pyramids of cold eggs, enveloped in the coils of long, serpent-like sausages; then a wall of massive saffron-cakes, fortified at the corners by towering *babas*—a sort of sponge-cake, of an immense height. There were also heaps of another sort of cake, called *Mazurkas*, covered all over with almonds. Thus the province of Masovia gives its name to one of the prettiest of national dances, and to this cake, which is most delicious. Besides all this, there were more substantial dishes, in the shape of tongues, dry and pickled fish, smoked hams, and roasted pigs, under the semblance of boars’ heads. Intersecting the numerous dishes were gold and silver jugs of old mead, decanters of liqueurs, and musty bottles of choice wines.

When our host and his guests were all assembled, in walked the priest, attired in his robes; he pronounced a solemn benediction on the feast, and then sprinkled it with holy water; which proceeding, according to the popular belief, prevents the possibility of its becoming hurtful, as it might easily prove, after a long period of rigid abstinence. Immediately this ceremony was concluded, a door opened in the back-ground, and in walked the preparer of the whole—the head cook, in his white cap and apron, and began carving up the different meats. After him entered the bailiffs and stewards employed on the estates, the housekeeper and the ladies’ maids. Meanwhile, our host proceeded to cut up a cold egg into thin slices, and then went with his plate by turns to every one of the company, exchanging congratulations, which he ratified by eating one half of a slice, whilst he offered the other half to his guest. After this indispensable ceremony everybody began to attack the savoury dishes on the table; but, voracious as were the appetites, the supplies were so large that, to all appearance, they were but little diminished. This same feasting took place every morning, till the whole was consumed. Formerly it was a rule, in the more opulent houses, to keep the Easter Feast open till Whitsunday, which will give you some little idea of the immense quantity of provisions that must have been prepared, and the unbounded hospitality of Polish hosts.

An old almanac of the Duchy of Posen, from the beginning of the seventeenth century, contains the following description of an Easter banquet:—

“This year the Palatine S. gave a splendid Easter Feast at Dereczyn, at which a great number of Polish and Lithuanian lords attended. A lamb, seasoned with Pistachio plums, and other costly spices, was placed in the centre of the table. But only the ladies, the senators, the first dignitaries of the crown, and the clergy, were admitted to partake of that delicate dish. On one side of the table four colossal wild boars, stuffed with pigs, sausages, and hams, were laid down, and represented the seasons of the year. The cook exhibited the most masterly abilities in contriving to roast these huge animals entire. On the opposite side twelve stags, with gilt antlers, adorned with emblems of the corresponding months, attracted general admiration. Smaller game, such as hares, rabbits, partridges, woodcocks, and pheasants, filled their capacious insides. The prodigiously large cakes, the circumference of which could only be measured by yards, were fifty-two in number, to answer that of the weeks in the year. Three hundred and sixty-five *babas*, in honour of as many days, hedged in the whole, and closed the circle of the year. In addition to this, the same numbers and divisions were represented by four golden pitchers, filled with wine of King Batory’s time; twelve silver ones, with King Sigismundus’ wine; fifty-two silver barrels with that of Cyprus, Spain, and Italy; three hundred and sixty-five hogs-heads of Hungary; and lastly a vat, containing 8,760 pints of mead, the number of hours in the annual revolution.”

The astonishing quantity of provisions at this Feast can only be equalled by the elegant taste and novel ideas displayed at another which took place in the ancient and interesting city of Cracow:—

“I was present yesterday,” says an old writer of Cracow, “at the Easter Feast given by N. C., one of the magistrates of our town. On an immense table, covered with the finest cloth in the world, the circumference of which might have afforded comfortable seats for at least one hundred persons, twelve massive silver dishes bore the weight of salt pork, sucking-pigs, spiced sausages, and pyramids of eggs, painted in varied colours and devices, but chiefly in red. A group of figures, made of pastry and sugar, represented the action and the plot of a comic play. Pilate, for instance, was exhibited in the act of picking Mahomet’s pocket of a sausage—evidently an epigram, since everybody knows that neither Jew nor Mahometan is allowed to eat pork. A lamb of great beauty occupied the centre of the table. I would have given all the riches and dainties I saw there for the eyes of that pet creature, for they were nothing less than two precious diamonds, each of a nut’s size. I further remarked large silver gilt decanters and cruets with oil and vinegar. Four enormous pitchers, filled with old mead, stood amidst a host of golden cups. Silver plates, with preserves of all sorts of fruits, with which Providence has so bountifully enriched our country, formed another circle. Enamelled baskets contained musty bottles of the choicest and rarest wines. But it is high time I should speak of the pastry, the cakes, and the tarts, the number and the names of which it were impossible to remember. The principal cake was at least four yards in circumference, and one in

Easter in Poland.

height. Different figures adorned its edge. The speaking images of the twelve apostles were distinguished from others by their size. Judas, with his yellow, saffron-coloured moustaches, amused me most. The figure of Jesus Christ, holding a superb banner, stood erect in the centre of the cake. Over our Saviour's head an angel, suspended by a wire scarcely perceptible, was seen directing his course towards heaven, and dropping from his lips the following motto :— '*Resurrexit sicut dixit Alleluja.*' Other cakes represented profane or mythological subjects. I was exceedingly pleased with one called 'The Bath.' In a lake filled with white mead gold and silver fishes were seen swimming. Nymphs were freely bathing amongst them, whilst a malicious cupid sat on the brim of the cake, and shot his darts at their sparkling eyes, which they vainly strove to conceal."

We think that few, if any, of the feasts of the present day could surpass in splendour and magnificence this ancient banquet; and yet we have in general but a poor idea of the refinement and elegance of the Polish nation especially, thinking them to have been nothing better than warlike barbarians.

To return to our own Easter feast at Vasilowka, we must not forget to inform you that a large table was also spread in the servants' hall, on which was a certain quantity of provisions prepared for all the people employed on the estates.

When the banquet was at an end, the company adjourned to the drawing-room, and L—— was unanimously called upon to ratify the promise he had given the previous day. His violoncello being brought, the society formed itself into a circle; and, in the midst of a breathless silence, the artist drew his bow slowly across the strings of his instrument. Those first, pure, thrilling tones were enough to proclaim his power; but when, after a brilliant introduction, he played one of the sweet and plaintive melodies of the Ukraine, not a heart was there unmoved. The colour went and came in the fair faces of the ladies, as different chords in their memories were touched; and fast and unheeded fell the tears down many a bright face. The good old priest declared he thought himself in heaven, listening to celestial strains, and could scarcely refrain from sobbing aloud. When the inspired musician had finished, our host rose and shook him warmly by the hand; everybody crowded round him, repeating their admiration and their thanks; but his greatest triumph was in the tears that had been shed by eyes that a few moments before had been beaming with smiles, and in the quickened beatings of the hearts till then languid and indifferent. Oh! music! divine music! how potent is thy spell! Rank, power, and riches bow down before thee, and acknowledge thy dominion. After this the company separated; a party of gentlemen and boys was formed to go and roast potatoes in the forest, and the rest went to smoke their cigars and play billiards. We ladies retired to our rooms to repose ourselves, and prepare for the dinner, which took place at the unusual hour of six, it being the general custom here to dine be-

tween one and two. The evening was enlivened by dancing; and long and untiringly was the beautiful and animated mazurka kept up. We have never seen a dance which pleased us so much as this. It is so gay, spirited, and graceful, and so thoroughly characteristic of the Polish nation, that we could sit and look at it for hours.

On Easter Monday, from break of day, our ears were assailed with such a confused noise of screams, mingled with laughter, of persons running to and fro along the passages, and tearing up and down the stairs, that we had great misgivings lest the whole household should suddenly have gone mad. On putting our head outside of the door, to inquire into the cause of this tumult, a strange sight presented itself. The corridor and staircase was flooded with water, and fragments of broken jugs and bottles strewed the ground. The young people had been keeping up one of the old customs, that of throwing water on each other at every favourable opportunity. Woe to the unlucky ones who were caught in bed, they were deluged without a possibility of escape. This exciting warfare is kept up unceasingly all Easter Monday. In former times, ladies and gentlemen even would supply themselves with pans of water, and throw them over each other; but in these more civilized days they perform their spiriting more gently, and sprinkle with a few drops of *eau de Cologne*, from an elegant little bottle, or shake the dew from a bouquet of morning-gathered flowers. But the servants and the country people keep up the custom in all its pristine glory, and some poor creatures even get a ducking in a pond. The origin of this strange proceeding is much disputed. Some think it dates from the introduction of Christianity into Poland, and is in commemoration of the immersing in water of those who were baptized. Others say it took its rise from the time of the Apostles, when multitudes of the faithful being assembled, to talk over the wonderful resurrection of our Lord, the Jews threw water on them to mark their contempt, and thus dispersed them. It seems that even in those remote times, the art of dispersing a multitude of excited people was well known. Marshal Lobau, in the present day, gave it as his opinion, that water would be far more effectual than fire-arms for such a purpose. For our own part, we have met with a solution equally, if not more probable than either of the above. It is in the travels of Major Symes, the English envoy to Ava in the year 1795. He says, that in Hindostan, on the 12th of April, when the New Year of the Birmans commences, all the women throw water on the men, to purify them from their sins of the past year. The men in return perform the same office for the women. We know the affinity that has been found to exist between the Slavonians and the people of Hindostan; and to this we would add that with the former nation also the New Year began in Spring, and it was

at just the same season they had the custom of drowning death or winter, which with them is synonymous. It seems to us, then, evident, that this custom of sprinkling with water had the same origin and meaning in India and amongst the Slavonians, and was intended there also to purify them from their sins.

After breakfast we set off, in two carriages-and-four, and escorted by several gentlemen on horseback, to visit a family at about five miles distance. Our road lay through a beautiful country; a forest of pine and fir-trees bordered it for some distance; but it was very rough and disagreeable, and great part of the time our horses had to drag the carriages through heavy masses of sand; and many dreadful jolts did we receive from great stones and deep holes. These, however, only served to excite our mirth; for the party was in high spirits, and the day was lovely. The entrance to Planta was through a long winding avenue of willows, which opened upon a grass-plot, ornamented with flower-beds, in front of the house—a rambling, low, old-fashioned abode, built entirely of wood, and covered with ivy and wild vine. It presented a most picturesque appearance, and small as it appeared from the outside, was found to contain a great number of rooms. We were most hospitably received by the owners of Planta, whom we found surrounded by their young family and a host of friends, busily engaged at the Easter feast. We were all speedily overwhelmed with good things, and pressed to eat on every side. Quite incapable of discussing the tenth part even of the piled up plates that were placed before us, and glad to escape for a while from the noise and tumult of the banquetting-room, we seized upon our charming friend Bronislas, and went off to examine a little quaint old edifice near the house, which had excited our curiosity on seeing it from the window. It was a chapel, and on entering it we perceived over the altar a strange old picture of the Virgin, which our companion assured us was the miraculous cause of the erection of the chapel on that spot. She told us that formerly—many years ago, of course—the lord of Planta was a man of the most dissolute habits, who lived surrounded by a set of companions equally wicked as himself, and that they did nothing but eat, drink, game, and swear. In his time, this picture of the Virgin hung in the old dining-hall, where their revels were mostly carried on. One day, to the surprise of all, the picture was missing! The master gave orders to have it looked for instantly, and restored to its place; but the picture was nowhere to be found, and at last the search was given up in despair. A few days after, however, one of the household going out to shoot, saw this very picture standing upright in a little marshy ground near the house. Full of astonishment, he communicated the surprising intelligence to his master, who severely reprimanding the servants for their careless search, ordered it to be hung up again in the dining-hall. He was obeyed in fear and trembling; but the very next

day the picture was again missing. Nothing more of it was seen for some days, when it was once more discovered upright in the same place where it was found before. This astonishing circumstance so affected the lord of Planta, that he instantly abandoned his sinful way of living, built a chapel on the spot where the picture was so miraculously found, and hung it up over the altar. From that time he was as remarkable for the sanctity of his life, as he had been previously for his wickedness, and did an immense deal of good in the neighbourhood.

Such, then, was the history of this quaint little chapel, related to us with a perfect seriousness, as being thoroughly believed in; and we, who unfortunately were not endowed with an equal faith, admired the result, though we were unable to credit the means.

On returning in the evening, the nightingale was singing most divinely. The sky was serene, the air calm, all nature was silent, as if listening with enchantment to the delicious warbling of this incomparable singer of the woods. Oh! how, at this moment, did our heart take to itself the wings of memory, and fly back to those dear times when the bright moon shone, the hushed air listened, and the nightingale of our own beloved woods poured forth her tender lays; and we dreamed of love, and the fair world we were entering, and thought care and sorrow, separation and death, were but vain words, of which we should never know the meaning. Oh! youth, youth! how blindly happy, how wilfully trusting art thou! And would we have it otherwise? Oh, no! those few happy, golden years at the beginning, cast a ray of light over many a long and weary life, that would be dark indeed without it.

The following morning we were informed of the arrival of a most important personage, a Jew pedlar, who pays a certain number of visits here during the year, bringing with him every imaginable ware. Yankiel was ushered eagerly into the housekeeper's room, where he unpacked his goods, and displayed them to the admiring eyes of every female in the house, we believe. There was not an article could be asked for, but he had it; and not in vain did he arrive, for many were the purchasers he found. He retailed also all the news he had picked up in the different mansions he had visited during his pilgrimage; and many and acceptable were the bits of intelligence he brought to our hostess and her daughters, of friends and relations at a distance. The servants, of course, had their share; but Yankiel was a discreet man, and waited a seasonable opportunity. In the midst of all this, our thoughts insensibly wandered to Scott's delightful novel of "*Kenilworth*," and we fancied the pedlar before us to be the identical Wayland Smith of never-to-be-forgotten memory. The graceful and pretty Vanda was no unfit representative of the sweet and hapless Amy Robsart, as she stooped over the rich stuffs spread before her, and examined the delicate laces that the

eager pedlar held up to view. Here, however, the resemblance ceased; and with a sigh for the many long miles that lay between us and the old mouldering ruins of Kenilworth, we turned away.

An excursion on horseback was proposed; so the steeds were brought to the door, and off we started, to visit a famous birch-tree, about which Broinislav has promised us another legend, *quite true!* Besides ourself, and our two charming friends, Vanda and her sister, who both ride remarkably well, although it is by no means the custom for ladies to mount in this country, our party consisted of a young English girl, governess in a family in the neighbourhood, whose history is a little enveloped in mystery, though it is our belief that she has quitted her family and country, solely actuated by the romantic desire of depending upon her own exertions in a foreign land; thus making for herself trials and griefs, which in the natural order of things would have been spared her, had she remained at home, which from all accounts she might have done if she would. With pretty black eyes, *un petit nez retroussé*, and dark ringlets all round her head, she is, however, very captivating, and may perhaps end by making some brilliant conquest. By her side was a cavalier, very tall and stiff, who being far more learned in the art of reading than of riding, was mightily afraid of tumbling off his horse, and caused us a great deal of merriment by his unalterable gravity and awkwardness. Then there was the young artist, with his fair hair and melancholy eyes, wrapt in a mute admiration of the charms of nature, and of the goddess of his thoughts. Two or three others completed our cavalcade, which set off at a brisk trot. After an hour's delightful ride, we arrived at the spot, on the borders of a large forest of oaks, where stood the ruins of the ancient church of St. Martin. Innumerable tombstones marked the resting-place of many a generation. All around told of ruin and decay; but a large white birch-tree, like an angel's wing, protected with its shade the peaceful slumber of the dead. With a curiosity, tempered by the solemnity of the place we stood in, we demanded of our companions if this were the tree about which they had promised us the history. "It is," said Bromislav; "and if you will listen, I will recount to you what the peasants relate to their children from one generation to another. But do not imagine I have anything either very exciting or interesting to tell you, for it is a simple village legend of the Duchy." Having descended from our horses, we formed a circle round our young and beautiful narrator, who, with a heightened colour, and a voice which at first trembled slightly from emotion, thus began:—"Long years ago, the only child of a poor loving mother, of these parts, fell sick and died. When his little cold body was laid in the dark grave beside this church, you may imagine the grief, the despair of the poor woman; for the boy had been her only consolation, her only hope, and she had made a veritable idol of him, and worshipped him. But one day the sexton,

running in great fear and trepidation to the village pastor, cried out, 'What evil has come upon us? What terrible things are passing in our churchyard? In vain we have buried the widow's little boy, who died a week ago; notwithstanding all our efforts, and all our care, one little hand is constantly forcing its way out of the grave!' The astonished priest, cross in hand, runs to the cemetery. A hundred times he blesses the hand, sprinkles it with holy water, and himself buries it in the ground. Kneeling beside the little grave, he pours out his soul to God; but in vain he prays, the hand again forces its way through the earth, and shines in appalling whiteness on the green grass. The pastor causes the church bells to be rung, to summon all the inhabitants of the village. Wondering, and affrighted, they crowd around him. Young and old, women and children, all are there. Then the pastor, turning to the mother of the child, said:—"What is passing in the grave of your son? My poor comprehension cannot fathom the awful mystery; but you must surely know. Explain, then, this terrible sight." The poor mother wrung her hands in despair, and replied only by tears and moans. But being menaced with the malediction of God, she at last gave utterance to the following words:—"It is the punishment of my blind and senseless adoration of my child. God is just. He sends me evil for evil. I spoiled my boy by over-indulgence. I never chastised him for his faults; and one unhappy day he lifted his hand against me in his anger, and struck me!"—"Take then a birch, and strike the hand of your child. He prays for chastisement on earth, that he may escape punishment in eternity." The poor trembling woman hesitated, fearing to approach the grave; but the pastor cried in a voice of thunder, 'Strike!' Summoning up all her courage, she stepped forward, and with eyes turned away, the mother performed the terrible and painful task.

"Behold! oh miracle of heaven! the instant the birch touched the hand, it shrank withering away, and the earth closed over it; but the mother fell fainting on the ground, overcome by the force of her emotion.

"A feeling of terror filled every heart; a cold shudder ran through the veins of all who witnessed this scene, in commemoration of which the pastor planted the birch on the grave. By a second miracle, the following spring it had become an immense tree, covered with foliage. Many centuries passed away; the church crumbled into ruins, a forest of oaks grew up around, but the birch-tree remained always the same to this day; and the tradition of it is handed down from one generation to another, giving a fearful warning to those foolish parents, who neglect to teach their children that commandment of God, which says, '*Honour thy Father and thy Mother.*'"

We were all more or less affected by this story, and the charming way in which it had been recounted; and it was some time after we had left the spot before we ladies at least reco-

vered our usual spirits: On reaching Vasilowka, we encountered Boleslas and his cousins, just returned from heron shooting. The delighted boy himself had been the most successful, having shot no less than three; and with pride he presented his mother with a few little glossy feathers that form the tuft on the head of the heron, and are valuable on account of their scarcity. Our evening closed in again with dancing, singing, and music; and it was late in the night before any one thought of repose.

On the fourth day of Easter week we had to say adieu to our pretty Vanda, who went with one of her aunts to Posen, to assist in quality of bridesmaid at the wedding of one of her friends, a very beautiful and elegant young lady, whom we had the pleasure of knowing when there. Remarkable to relate, the gentleman to whom she is about to give her hand is equally handsome with herself; they will indeed be a charming pair—may Heaven bless them! After their wedding, they will pass a few weeks with their families, as in Poland it is not the custom to take the departure immediately the marriage

vows are pronounced, as is the case in our country; and then they will set off for London and the "Great Exposition." We know of many weddings that have been arranged this winter at the Balls during the Carnival, and this journey was stipulated for in every case: going to see the Exposition has quite taken the place of a tour in Italy, which used formerly to be the condition upon which young ladies bound themselves for life.

The day after Vanda's departure there was a wedding in the village. It took place, that is to say the feasting and dancing, at the residence of the pastor, who very kindly superintended the whole affair. Everybody from the Château went; and we all danced with the peasants, who of course were highly pleased at our condescension. Some other time we will give you an account of one of these weddings, for they are curious and amusing; but for the present we must say farewell, merely premising that Friday and Saturday were passed in receiving crowds of visitors at Vasilowka, and that we quitted the hospitable roof of our friends, with many and sincere regrets, the following week, carrying with us the most pleasing reminiscences of "Easter in Poland."

